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April 21, 2010

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"Today, our nation takes another important step forward in honoring our veterans for their courage and bravery, and recognizing the tremendous sacrifices of their families," said Rep. Melancon.

"Our veterans deserve the best services we can offer, and I am proud to support our women veterans with this bill to expand and improve their health care, including providing care for female veterans' newborns for the first time in history."

"And since caregivers are often on the front lines of tending to our wounded warriors, this bill would provide them with more support services, including counseling and mental health services." This bill also recognizes the challenges facing those veterans who return from Iraq and Afghanistan with severe injuries by providing their caregivers with health care and a stipend, so they can focus on helping their loved ones recover."

The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act is endorsed by the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, AMVETS, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Wounded Warrior Project, and the National Military Family Association.

The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act would:

- provide support to family and others who care for disabled, ill, or injured veterans;

- enhance health services for the 1.8 million women veterans, including care for newborns for the first time in history;
- expand mental health services for veterans and health care access for veterans in rural areas; and
- prohibit copayments for veterans who are catastrophically disabled.

The legislation builds on other recent measures Congressman Melancon has voted for in Congress to support veterans, troops, and military families. Congressman Melancon was a strong supporter of the [New GI Bill](#), passed in 2008, which restored the [promise of a full, four-year college education](#) for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. Congressman Melancon also supported provisions in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (the "Recovery Act") that provided a tax credit for hiring unemployed veterans and helped disabled veterans weather the economic downturn with a one-time tax credit of \$250.

Congressman Melancon has consistently voted for veterans and defense funding bills, including the largest increase in Veterans Affairs funding in the agency's history, to ensure that troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan receive the best health care available. Congressman Melancon has also supported reform legislation that will guarantee timely and reliable veterans funding, and voted to give U.S. troops a pay raise in both 2008 and 2009.

Summary of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act:

WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE

The bill will expand and improve VA health care services for the 1.8 million women who have bravely served their country. It requires the VA to conduct a study of barriers to women veterans seeking health care; educate and train mental health professionals caring for veterans with sexual trauma; establish a child care pilot program for women receiving regular and intensive mental health care and intensive health care services; and provide up to seven days of post-delivery health care to a newborn child of a women veteran.

RURAL HEALTH IMPROVEMENTS

This legislation improves health care for veterans living in rural areas by expanding transportation for veterans to local VA hospitals and clinics through VA grants to local Veterans Service Organizations.

CAREGIVER ASSISTANCE

Support services will now be available for caregivers of all U.S. veterans, include training and education; counseling and mental health services; respite care including 24 hours in-home respite care; and information on the support services available to caregivers through other public, private, and non-profit agencies. Caregivers who live with severely wounded Iraq and Afghanistan veterans will be eligible for health care through the CHAMPVA program (Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs) and receive a monthly

financial stipend based on the amount and degree of personal care services provided.

MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Access to counseling and other mental health centers will be provided to any member of the Armed Forces (including members of the National Guard and Reserves, who served during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom but who are no longer on active duty.) The VA will also be required to conduct a veterans' suicide study.

OTHER HEALTH CARE ISSUES

The VA will be prohibited from collecting copayments from veterans who are catastrophically disabled. The VA will also be required to provide hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care for certain Vietnam-era veterans exposed to herbicide and Gulf-War era veterans who have insufficient medical evidence to establish a service-connected disability. The legislation also creates a pilot program, which would provide specified dental services to veterans, survivors, and dependents of veterans through a dental insurer.

HOMELESS VETERANS

Building on legislation Congressman Melancon [supported last month](#) to help returning and homeless veterans find housing and jobs, this bill will expand the organizations offering transitional housing and other support for homeless veterans that can receive grants or per diems from the VA, an issue particularly important to veterans in rural areas.

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